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## Family Reading Guide for "Curveball"

*Conversation starters for parents and children*

### Getting Started

#### What This Book Is About

"Curveball" follows Elena Rueda, a dedicated athlete whose knee injury forces her to step away from the sport she loves. Instead of giving up, Elena discovers unexpected joy in live action role playing (LARP) alongside her brother Benji. This character-driven graphic novel explores what happens when the activity that defines us is taken away—and what we discover about ourselves in the space that opens up. Friendship and fun take center stage in this honest, warmhearted story.

#### Key Themes Your Child Will Encounter:

- **Identity beyond achievement:** Elena discovers she is more than her athletic accomplishments—a message important for any child who has tied their self-worth to performance
- **Joy without competition:** LARP offers Elena an activity where there are no winners or losers, just participation and creativity
- **Sibling connection:** Benji opens a door for Elena by sharing something he loves, modeling how siblings can support each other in unexpected ways
- **Resilience and adaptation:** The story shows that resilience isn't always about bouncing back to the same place—sometimes it means finding a new direction
- **Friendship:** The bonds formed in LARP show that community can be found in surprising places
- **The value of play:** Doing things purely for enjoyment, without scorekeeping, has real and lasting value

**Tip for Parents:** This graphic novel uses its visual format beautifully to show emotion and action. It's a wonderful entry point for children who enjoy visual storytelling. If your child has experienced an injury, illness, or other setback, this book offers a gentle and honest framework for discussing those feelings.

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### Discussion Questions

#### About Elena and Her Journey

- How do you think Elena feels when she first learns about her injury?
- Why do you think Elena's identity feels so connected to her sport?
- What brave thing does Elena do when she joins Benji's LARP group?
- How does Elena change over the course of the story?

#### About Joy and Play

- What does LARP offer Elena that sports don't?
- Why might playing a game without winners feel different from competition?
- Have you ever tried something new and discovered you loved it?



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- What activities in your life do you do just because they're fun, not because you're trying to win?

### **Fun Conversation Starters**

- If you could play any character in a LARP adventure, who would you be?
  - What would you do if you couldn't do your favorite activity for a whole month?
  - What's something your sibling or friend loves that you've never tried?
  - If you started a new club or activity tomorrow, what would it be?
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### **Discussion Activities**

#### **Exploring New Activities**

- Try a new activity together as a family—something none of you have done before
- Look up local LARP groups, improv classes, or tabletop gaming clubs
- Give each family member a chance to introduce their favorite activity to the others
- Reflect together on activities you do for fun versus activities you do to achieve

#### **Connecting to Graphic Novel Format**

- Explore other graphic novels together to discuss how visual storytelling works
  - Try creating your own comic strip or graphic story
  - Compare how the same event might feel different in a novel versus a graphic novel
  - Discuss what emotions or moments the illustrations in "Curveball" captured best
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### **Conversation Tips for Parents**

#### **Talking About Identity**

- Ask your child what activities or qualities they feel most define them—and gently explore what would remain if those were taken away
- Share a time when you had to give up something important and what you discovered in the process
- Celebrate your child's multiple identities: they are not just "an athlete" or "a reader"—they are a complex, wonderful whole person

#### **Supporting After Setbacks**

- Validate feelings first: "It makes sense that you're disappointed or upset."
- Avoid rushing to silver linings—let your child sit with their feelings before discussing new possibilities
- Look for the "Benji" in your child's life: someone who might share something new and unexpected
- Remind your child that trying something unfamiliar takes real courage

#### **Making It Personal**

- Share an activity that brings you joy without requiring you to win or excel
- Discuss how your family defines success beyond trophies and rankings



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- Talk about a time a sibling or friend opened a new door for you
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### **Activity Ideas**

#### **Creative and Active Projects**

- Plan and run your own backyard LARP adventure with friends or family
- Create character sheets for fictional LARP personas—give each character a name, skill, and backstory
- Write or draw a comic strip showing a moment of discovery or joy
- Learn the rules of a new board game or tabletop role-playing game together

#### **Reflection Projects**

- Create a "Who I Am" collage that includes all the things that make up your identity beyond one activity
  - Write a letter to Elena with advice for her hardest moment
  - Draw two scenes: Elena before and after discovering LARP, capturing how she has grown
  - Journal about a time you discovered something new you loved
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"Curveball" is a gift for any child—or adult—who has ever had to reimagine themselves after a setback. Elena Rueda's journey reminds us that we are always more than the single thing we're best at, and that joy can arrive from the most unexpected directions. Let this story open a conversation in your family about what you love, not just what you achieve—about the activities that light you up inside, with or without a scoreboard.